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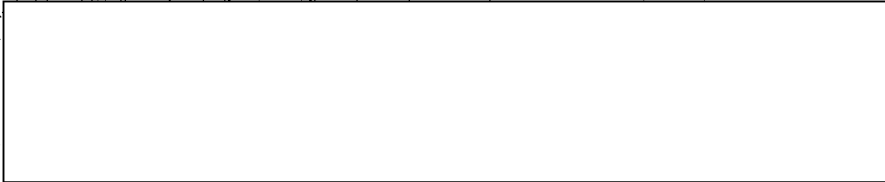


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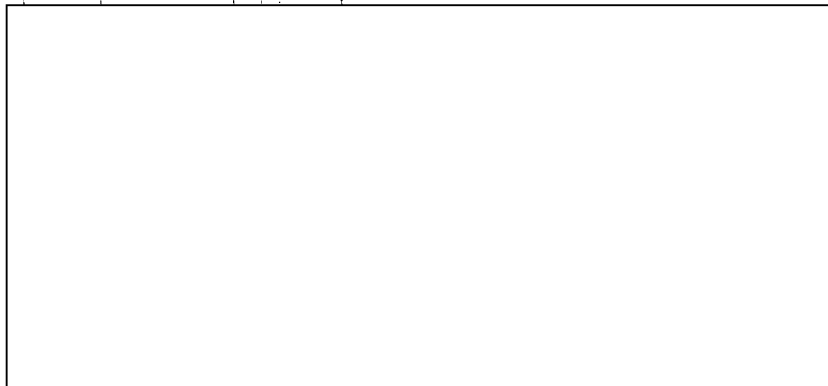
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## **The Soviet Approach to the UN Special Session on Disarmament**

*Central Intelligence Agency  
National Foreign Assessment Center*

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### ***Key Judgments***

US-Soviet diplomatic exchanges on agenda matters for the coming UN Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD), as well as recent speeches by Soviet President Brezhnev and Party Secretary Ponomarev, indicate that the USSR has revised both the tone and content of its approach to the SSOD. Ponomarev's 24 April address before the Socialist International Conference on Disarmament was notable for its emphatic justification of Soviet military and arms control policies in contrast to those of the United States and China. Brezhnev's speech on 25 April indicates that the Soviets will put forward two new proposals concerning conventional arms in addition to those submitted last September to the UN Preparatory Committee for the Special Session. Brezhnev's speech also suggests that the Soviets might be rethinking their position on security assurances to nonnuclear states.

The two speeches, together with the instructions of 18 April to the Soviet delegation to the Preparatory Committee to withdraw from the drafting of joint nuclear texts with the US and the UK for submission to the SSOD, suggest that Moscow has opted in favor of a more assertive approach to the SSOD, one that is calculated to generate international support for Soviet disarmament policies and put pressure on the US to make concessions on Soviet disarmament initiatives. The likelihood of a US-Soviet confrontation at the SSOD will be limited, however, by the Soviet desire to enlist US support on disarmament machinery issues and to defend the US-Soviet record on arms control negotiations.

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## **The Soviet Approach to the UN Special Session on Disarmament**

The UN General Assembly's Special Session on Disarmament (SSOD) will meet in New York from 23 May until 28 June.

Following the initiative by the nonaligned nations at the Colombo Conference in 1976, a formal decision to hold the SSOD was taken by the General Assembly in December 1976. Simultaneously, a 54-nation preparatory committee was established to draw up the terms of reference.

The call by nonaligned countries for the SSOD reflected both frustration over the pace of nuclear arms control negotiations to date and a general consensus that the existing machinery for multilateral disarmament talks, both at the UN itself and at the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) in Geneva, is dominated by US and Soviet interests and is unresponsive to the concerns of the nonaligned, nonnuclear states.

### **Initial Soviet Posture**

The initial Soviet attitude toward the SSOD was relatively reserved. The Soviets did not wish to have a confrontation between nuclear and nonaligned states at the SSOD, nor did they wish to see the fundamental structure of the CCD, where the United States and the USSR are cochairmen, radically altered. It was equally important to Moscow to prevent the SSOD from adopting any concrete measures, such as time limits for the resolution of particular issues, that might restrict its freedom of action. The USSR wanted to limit the SSOD to a discussion of broad issues and general guidelines for future disarmament undertakings—in keeping with the universalist character of Soviet disarmament pronouncements.

The Soviet working papers submitted to the SSOD Preparatory Committee last September were a conglomeration of Soviet disarmament proposals presented over the past several years. The draft documents were cosponsored by all of the Warsaw Pact countries except Romania.

The basic Soviet proposals for incorporation into the Program of Action to be drafted at the SSOD called for:

- An end to the production of nuclear weapons.
- Bilateral and multilateral measures to help prevent nuclear war.
- Complete and general prohibition of nuclear weapons tests.
- Efforts to strengthen the nonproliferation "regime."

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- Regional disarmament measures, including mutual reductions of armed forces and the establishment of zones of peace and nuclear-free zones.
- Maintenance of the existing structure of international disarmament machinery.
- A World Disarmament Conference.

The Soviets and their allies also presented a separate draft declaration on disarmament that noted the existence of previous Eastern proposals as a "basis for negotiations and decisions," including the prohibition of mass destruction weapons, no first use of nuclear weapons, and renunciation of the threat of force among states.

Soviet representatives at the United Nations subsequently made it clear that a proposed ban on the neutron bomb was subsumed under the call to end production of nuclear weapons. But, Soviet delegates assured US interlocutors, Moscow did not wish to engage in a confrontation on this issue; rather, it wished "to cooperate" with the US during the SSOD.

The professed Soviet desire for cooperation was probably a reflection of Moscow's perception that the US and the USSR shared a common interest in preventing a confrontation at the SSOD between nuclear and nonaligned states. To this end, the Soviets agreed with the US and the UK to the drafting of joint texts on nuclear disarmament issues for submission to the SSOD. The most important issue addressed by the texts was that of negative security assurances in which the nuclear states would pledge not to use nuclear weapons, except in self-defense, against nonnuclear states. The precise formulation of such an assurance is significant because of Western desires for flexible nuclear defense options in Western Europe and the Far East.

#### **The Soviet Position Shifts**

The joint texts were substantially agreed upon with the US and the UK when, on 18 April, Moscow instructed its delegation to the SSOD Preparatory Committee to withdraw from the drafting exercise. The sudden Soviet decision to withdraw so late in the game may have been in part a tactical reaction to the defection on 9 April of UN Under Secretary General Arkadiy Shevchenko, who had been involved in SSOD matters and therefore probably aware of planned Soviet tactics. It seems more likely, however, that the Shevchenko defection served, at most, as a catalyst to a decision already in the making in Moscow to revise the Soviet approach to the SSOD.

A number of factors probably led the Soviets to revise their approach to the Special Session:

- *Continuing concern that the SSOD might evolve into a confrontation between the nuclear haves and have-nots and that the Soviets would be tied too closely with the Western haves.* On several occasions Soviet

delegates to the SSOD preparatory talks alluded to this concern, emphasizing that the Program of Action to be adopted at the SSOD must focus on conventional as well as nuclear disarmament issues. Soviet UN Ambassador Troyanovsky, for example, told US representatives that the USSR has been urging nonaligned states to take a "more realistic approach" to both the Program of Action and disarmament machinery issues. In light of such concerns, the Soviets may have reasoned that it would be wiser to put some distance between themselves and the US on nuclear issues so not to contribute to a confrontation between nuclear and nonaligned states while at the same time unilaterally underscoring Soviet support for conventional disarmament measures.

- *An opportunistic assessment that the US has been put on the defensive on the issue of nuclear disarmament, primarily as a result of the Soviet campaign against the neutron bomb.* The Soviets will undoubtedly continue their vehement campaign against the neutron bomb at the SSOD and are reportedly working behind the scenes to orchestrate World Peace Council demonstrations during the SSOD to protest US production of neutron weapons. The lure of propaganda and tactical diplomatic gain therefore may have contributed to a Soviet judgment that the nuclear disarmament issue could be manipulated to Soviet advantage.
- *A perception that the SSOD might be used to emphasize the legitimacy of the USSR's military policies in light of the dual nuclear and conventional threat to its Western and Eastern frontiers, and to castigate Peking for its refusal to engage in international disarmament talks.* This point was underscored by Politburo candidate and party secretary Boris Ponomarev in his Helsinki speech on 24 April before the Socialist International Conference on Disarmament. In a rhetorical response to Western critics of Soviet military strength, Ponomarev stated, "Do they take into account that we have to ensure the security of the whole territory, not only of the European, but also the Asiatic part of the country?" In an unusually explicit reference to the existence of a Chinese threat to the USSR, Ponomarev attacked Peking for its weapons buildup, "including nuclear types," and condemned China for its continued atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons "in spite of protests from many countries."

#### **Ponomarev Sets the Tone**

Ponomarev was harshly critical of the US and alleged that the world was on the precarious threshold of a new arms race because of the instability generated by American military-technological developments. Ponomarev specifically accused the US of a "policy" of new weapons development "which blurs the boundary between nuclear and conventional weapons." In addition

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to its implications for Soviet positions at the SSOD, this line may foreshadow a new Soviet international campaign against the deployment of US cruise missiles in Europe, as well as the neutron bomb. A report has been received that, prior to the convening of the Helsinki conference, a Soviet spokesman contacted Socialist International President Willy Brandt, on instructions from Moscow, and urged him to use his personal prestige and influence to oppose the production of new weapons of mass destruction, particularly the neutron bomb and the cruise missile.

#### **Brezhnev Sets the Agenda**

Speaking in Moscow, one day after the Ponomarev address, Brezhnev publicly proposed a disarmament "program" that will undoubtedly become the basis for Soviet diplomacy at the SSOD. He reiterated the Soviet call for a halt to the manufacture of nuclear weapons and a ban on all other mass destruction weapons (MDW) and advanced two new proposals, both concerning conventional arms:

- A halt in the development of new types of highly destructive conventional arms.
- Renunciation of any increases in the size of armies and in conventional armaments by the permanent members of the UN Security Council and countries associated with them through military agreements.

In reiterating the MDW proposal while simultaneously calling for a ban on highly destructive conventional weapons, Brezhnev, like Ponomarev, may have been taking aim at the cruise missile. During the recent Soviet-American discussions in Moscow, the Soviets pushed for discussion of an omnibus treaty prohibiting all new MDW. Similar overtures were made previously by the Soviets at the CCD.

Brezhnev's proposal for a freeze on conventional arms and armaments of Security Council permanent members and their allies appears to be directly linked to a similar Soviet freeze proposal offered repeatedly at the mutual and balanced force reductions talks (MBFR). It may be designed to enlist international sympathy through the SSOD for the Soviet negotiating position at the Vienna talks.

Several other statements by Brezhnev relate directly to the coming SSOD. He announced that:

- The USSR would forgo production of neutron weapons as long as the United States does likewise.
- The USSR would become a party to the Latin American nuclear-free zone established by the Treaty of Tlateloco.
- The USSR would use nuclear weapons only in the event of "aggression" against the Soviet Union or its allies "by another nuclear power."

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### **The Moscow Conversations**

On 28 and 29 April US and Soviet representatives met in Moscow to discuss issues related to the SSOD. The Soviet delegation was headed by Viktor Israelyan, chief of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Israelyan is a likely candidate for the principal Soviet representative to the SSOD, although Foreign Minister Gromyko will probably deliver the major Soviet address early in the session.

During the Moscow talks the Soviets reiterated their desire for US-Soviet cooperation at the SSOD but focused primarily on the issue of disarmament machinery. While they might, if necessary, agree to enlarge the CCD and possibly even to relinquishing the US-Soviet cochairmanship, the Soviets made it clear that they are not prepared to see any fundamental change in the structure of the CCD or its relationship to the UN.

On other issues, however, the Soviets staked out a more independent position. Israelyan stated that the USSR would push hard on Brezhnev's proposal for a halt on the production of nuclear weapons. He added that the Soviets will seek agreement in principle at the SSOD to start negotiations on this matter among the nuclear powers and other militarily significant states. In answer to a query by the US side, Israelyan stated that Chinese participation was not a precondition for the initiation of such talks.

Referring to Brezhnev's statement on the neutron weapon in his 25 April speech, Israelyan somewhat cryptically noted that, in the Soviets' opinion, the enhanced-radiation weapons issue was not fully resolved. He deflected a suggestion that the Soviets withdraw reference to this issue in their draft Program of Action.

Regarding the USSR's adherence to the Tlateloco Treaty, Israelyan stated that the USSR would append several reservations to its signature of Protocol II, including continued opposition to the transit of nuclear weapons through the territorial limits of the member states. Such a reservation is at odds with a US stipulation that transit rights are not affected by US adherence to the treaty. The Soviet reservation may be directed specifically at the transit of the Panama Canal by US ships carrying nuclear weapons, thus laying the diplomatic and propaganda basis for exacerbating an already delicate US foreign policy issue.

On the subject of negative security assurances for nonnuclear states, Israelyan pointed out that Brezhnev's 25 April formulation of "aggression" against the USSR or its allies "by another nuclear power" was "new." While this suggests that the Soviets may submit a similar proposal at the SSOD, it is possible that Brezhnev may have been floating the concept as a trial balloon to gauge nonaligned reactions. Neither Israelyan nor the Soviet media have amplified Brezhnev's statement on this issue.



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On the related issue of no first use of nuclear weapons, Brezhnev, in an interview given to a West German weekly and published in *Pravda* on 4 May, reiterated the formulation Moscow had advanced at the Belgrade CSCE Review Conference:

So far as the Soviet Union is concerned, I repeat, it is not thinking "of striking the first blow." On the contrary, well known is our official proposal to all participants in the all-European conference, including the US, to conclude an agreement on not being the first to use nuclear weapons against one another.

During his recent visit to West Germany, Brezhnev on several occasions drew attention to his 25 April proposals, specifically his call for a ban on MDW and mutual renunciation of the neutron bomb.

#### **Outlook for the SSOD**

The potential for a Soviet-American confrontation at the SSOD will be limited by the Soviet desire to enlist US support on the issue of disarmament machinery and in defending the US-Soviet record on arms control. The US and USSR are also likely to find common ground on the twin issues of promoting peaceful nuclear cooperation while restricting the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology.

The Soviets are likely to resist any nonaligned effort to compel the major nuclear powers to commit themselves to specific disarmament obligations or deadlines. Soviet diplomacy will probably attempt to channel nonaligned sentiment into a general condemnation of Peking's policy on arms control and US policy on enhanced-radiation weapons.

The principal Soviet proposals for incorporation into the Program of Action will undoubtedly encompass the Brezhnev "program" of 25 April, probably focusing on the call for a ban on nuclear weapons production and a corresponding ban on MDW. In addition, the Soviets will propose a World Disarmament Conference as an alternative to a second UN Special Disarmament Session.

Apart from these issues the Soviets will emphasize negative security guarantees for nonnuclear states and peaceful nuclear cooperation because of their importance to the nonaligned bloc. The negative security issue presents the possibility of serious East-West disagreement should the Soviets, supported by pressure from the nonnuclear states for some sort of agreed language among the principal nuclear powers, press the adoption of a formulation unacceptable to the US and NATO. Soviet Ambassador Troyanovsky told US officials on 10 May that Brezhnev's 25 April formulation on negative security assurances could lead some of the nonaligned nations to ask the US for comparable assurances. In like fashion the Soviets will reportedly attempt to manipulate the peaceful nuclear cooperation issue in an attempt to force South African accession to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

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*The author of this paper is [redacted]  
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should be directed to [redacted]*

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